

spoke only of the 'knights,' and when ministers wished to pack a parliament, their only care was to manage the returns from the counties.<sup>1</sup>

But there was one marked exception to the political insignificance of the towns. The merchant princes of London were among the greatest men of the land. Eichard Lyons and John of Northampton, Walworth, Brembre and Philpot were of the utmost importance to the parties to which they respectively adhered. Their wealth made them indispensable to an almost bankrupt government, and, as rulers of London, they had at their command a force formidable in itself, and still more formidable on account of its location. What the national guard and the mob of Paris were to Versailles in 1789, that the militia of the wards and the apprentices of London were to Westminster in 1376. More than once in this period the government was obliged to modify its policy, because it had no regular army round the Court to enforce its will on the city. During the Good Parliament, the House of Commons sat protected from John of Gaunt by the armed force of London, just as two and a half centuries later it was similarly protected from Charles the First. If the knights had been roughly handled, a formidable array would have poured out of London Gates into the precincts of Westminster, and it was thought at the time that this consideration withheld the Duke from usixag violence.<sup>2</sup>

The House of Commons was not at this time a battleground of parties ; it was itself a party.<sup>3</sup> There were many good reasons why the members should be of one mind. The upper middle classes who sent them to Westminster were at this time struggling for existence against economic distress, which they attributed partly to oppression and misgovern-ment by the nobles, partly to the rebellious attitude of the peasants, partly to the privilege and extortion of an overgrown Church. The key to their political action during the period may be found in the petitions, mostly refused, that are appended in long lists to the proceedings of every Parliament recounted in t<sup>h</sup>e Bolls. From these, several distinct motives for the policy of the Commons can be

<sup>1</sup> See Ap.

<sup>2</sup> *Chron. Ang.*, 74-6.

» See Ap.